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**BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS.**

  
**MALDA.**

*(Price : in India, Rs. 3 ; in England, 4s. 6d.)*

# **BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS.**

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## **MALDA**

**BY**

**G. E. LAMBOURN, Esq., B. A.**

**INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE.**



**CALCUTTA :**

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**1912.**

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# GAZETTEER

## OF THE

# MALDA DISTRICT.

### CHAPTER I.

#### PHYSICAL ASPECTS.

THE district of Mālda, which with that of Dinājpur forms the western portion of the Rājshāhi Division of Bengal, lies between 24° 30' and 25° 32' 30" north latitude and 87° 48' and 88° 33' 30" east longitude. It extends over 1,899 square miles, and is bounded on the north by the Purnea and Dinājpur districts, on the east by Dinājpur and Rājshāhi, on the south by Murshidābād, and on the west by Murshidābād, the Sonthal Parganās and Purnea. English Bāzār, situated at the centre of the district in 25° 0' 14" N. and 88° 11' 20" E., is the chief town and administrative headquarters.

GENERAL  
DESCRIP-  
TION  
BOUND-  
DARIES

The district was formed of outlying portions of the Purnea and Dinājpur districts in 1813, though it did not formally become an independent administrative unit till 1859. It takes its name from the town of Mālda, which is situated on the left bank of the Mahānandā river at its junction with the Kābindri river, and is about four miles north of English Bāzār (Engrezābād). A story is current of an old woman buying up the entire stock of mercury of a merchant who had come to the place to trade and who had been unable to dispose of his goods. Her wealth (*mal*) was such that she was able to devote all her purchase to cleaning one tank only, called the Pārāpukur (mercury tank) to this day, and thus to give the place the name of Mālda or the place of wealth. Another fanciful derivation is from *Malādāh*, a string of deep pools, a feature of the town being the deep depressions left by old water courses.

Origin of  
name.

At the present time the tendency is to transfer the name of Mālda to English Bāzār and to call Mālda, Old Mālda. For telegraphic, postal, steamer and railway purposes the names of English Bāzār and Mālda are Mālda and Nimāsarāi, respectively.

### Natural Divisions

The river Mahānandā flowing north and south roughly divides the district into two equal parts, corresponding by local tradition to the old boundary line of the Rār̥h and Iārendra. To this day the country to the east of the Mahānandā is called the *bārind*. Its characteristic feature is the relatively high land of the red clay soil of the old alluvium. West of the Mahānandā the country is again divided into two well defined parts by the Kālindrī river flowing west and east from the Ganges. North of the Kālindrī the distinguishing natural feature is the *tāl* land, the name applied to the land which floods deeply as the rivers rise, and drains by meandering streams into swamps or into the Kālindrī. There are extensive tracts of this land covered, where not cultivated, with tall grass in Ratna and Tulshātā thānās. South of the Kālindrī lies the most fertile and populous portion of the district. It is seamed throughout by old courses of the Ganges, upon the banks of one of which the city of Gaur once stood. The most striking natural feature is the continuous line of islands and accretions formed in the bed of the Ganges by its ever changing\* currents and known as the *diāra*,\* the long open stretches of which contrast with the patchwork-like effect of the miles of small embanked mulberry fields characteristic of the higher lands of this portion of the district.

### Hills

There are no hills in the district, unless a few elevated tracts in the *bārind* may be so described. Parts of these high lands have an elevation of from 50 to 100 feet above the level of the Ganges, and, being frequently intersected by deep water-channels, simulate the appearance of small hills.

### Soenery

Apart from these undulations the country is a low-lying plain covered with a succession of village sites with their adjacent fields and swampy tracts.

### RIVER SYSTEM.

The main rivers of the district are all of Himalayan or sub-Himalayan origin and flow in a southerly direction, their rise being controlled by the Ganges, which forms two-thirds of the western and the whole of the south-western boundary of the district. Next to the Ganges the most important is the Mahānandā which, flowing north and south through the middle of the district, receives on its right bank the waters of the Kālindrī, and from the east those of the Tāngan and the Pārnabhābā before itself joining the Ganges near Godāgāri. With the rise of the Ganges the discharge of the Mahānandā lessens, the

\* The *diāra* is the low bank of a river and *bārind* the high bank. By extension these terms are commonly used to mean land below and above flood level, respectively, in the later alluvium.

Tāngan and the Pārnabhābā bank <sup>•</sup>up and flow backwards expanding into huge lakes, whilst the slackened flow of the Kālindrī causes a similar phenomenon in respect of the network of small streams which drain the *idli*. Two other streams of importance are the Paglā and the Bhāgīrathī which, though they dry up into lines of pools in the cold weather, become large back-waters within the district, of the main stream of the Ganges in the rains. A short account of the rivers of the district is given below.

The Ganges first touches the district as it sweeps south round the Rājmahāl hills. At this point it is connected in the rains by various channels with the Kālindrī, though at the present time much Ganges water does not find its way down the Kālindrī, the mouths of the connections having silted up considerably as the Ganges has receded to the west. It would seem, however, that in this neighbourhood there has always been a navigable junction between the two rivers in the rains. Doctor Buchanan Hamilton, indeed, describes the lower part of the Kālindrī, between this point and the town of Mālda, as a branch of the Ganges. About two miles below Rājmahāl the Ganges sends off a small stream, the Chhōta Bhāgīrathī, which is presumably an old bed of the great river itself and is still revered as at least equal in holiness to any other part of the sacred stream. It runs first to the east and then generally in a southerly direction, bordering for about 13 miles the ruins of the city of Gaur. A little way further down, the Ganges sends off, also to the east, a larger branch, the Paglā, into which the Chhōta Bhāgīrathī ultimately flows. After their junction they flow past Kānsāt merging near Tārtipur into the Māra Ganga. In the map the main stream of the Ganges is shown as flowing past Tārtipur: at the present day, however, the island cut off by the Paglā extends right down to the mouth of the Mahānandā, and there are a number of *dāras* or channels which connect the Māra Ganga with the main stream in the rains. During the rains these carry off immense volumes of water to rejoin the Ganges near the mouth of the Mahānandā. Somewhere above the point where it finally leaves the district, the Ganges sends off southwards a branch which retains the name of the Bhāgīrathī, while the great river thenceforth loses the larger part of its sanctity. Boats come from East Bengal to bring Ganges water from Tārtipur as being the nearest present point of the sacred stream to East Bengal.

Alluvion and diluvion are perpetually taking place on the Mālda bank, which is throughout of sand, offering little

resistance to the changes of the current. An ordinary incident in the life of a riverain dweller is the hasty removal of his lightly built house to a new site and the complete disappearance of his lands, which reform as sandy *chars* miles away. An historical instance of wider destruction is the complete obliteration of the town of Tanra, an important city of Mahomedan times situated near Gaur. The Ganges is navigable throughout the year by steamers and country boats, and is nowhere fordable.

The Mahā-  
nandā

The Mahānandā, flowing from Purnea, first touches the district at its extreme north, from which point it forms its north-eastern boundary for about 25 miles, receiving as its sole tributary the Nagar from the east. It then enters the district and for the remainder of its course, in a direction that is almost due south, divides it, as has already been mentioned, into two nearly equal portions, finally falling into the Ganges at the southernmost point of the district. Its entire course within the district would be about 80 miles in a straight line, but its numerous windings add largely to that distance. At one time it formed a most important channel of through communication between Lower Bengal and the sub-Himalayan districts, but the construction of railways has diminished its importance in this respect, and at the present time the traffic on it is mainly in local exports and imports. Up to Mālda its average width is from 50 to 100 yards, the waterway at the railway bridge at Bargachi being 220 feet; the banks of sand and clay are steep and of about the same height, and cultivation is general. Below Mālda, where it receives the water of the Kālindri, it widens out to an average of 200 to 600 yards: its banks are alternately sheer and sloping: the cultivation is more intense and population denser. Throughout the channel is generally deep, but the silting up of the Kālindri connections with the Ganges has diminished the volume of water it carries, so that in the dry season it becomes fordable in several places even as far down as Nawābganj. In the rains, when the snows melt, the river rises 20 to 30 feet and even more in years of high flood. Occasionally the river straightens itself across a loop, as at Gumāstāpur in 1867 and at Charamon in 1909, but in general the diluvion and alluvion which goes on is more gradual.

The  
Kālindri.

Of its tributaries, the Kālindri enters the district from Purnea near Hātibhāpa. The main body of its waters are brought down from the mountains of Nepal by the Panar, which assumes the name of Kālindri shortly before its entrance into the district. In the rains, as has been noticed, it connects



with the Ganges on its right bank: on its left it receives the drainage of the *tdl* land of the west of Tulsihātā and Ratuā thānās by a network of streams, of which the most important are the Kap, Kos, Kankar and Kalkas, all of which cease to flow in the cold weather. It runs in a south-easterly direction and with a very winding course till it meets the Mahānandā at Mālda, the distance in a straight line being about 30 miles. Its banks of sand and clay are generally steep and about the same height, though, as in the lower reaches of the Mahānandā, there are stretches of sloping bank where alluvion and diluvion has taken place. Cultivation is general and population dense from Bhaluka downwards: it is nowhere fordable in the rains.

The Tāngan and Pārnabhābā on the left bank are the next important tributaries of the Mahānandā; these rivers flow from Dinājpur into the north-eastern corner of the district, where there are connections between them. At this point the country is low (*duba*) and of later alluvium. This low land continues into the district by the two broad valleys of the Tāngan and Pārnabhābā, which are divided by a triangular stretch of *bāring* country, the base of the triangle being a line roughly parallel to the Mahānandā and a few miles from it, whilst its general direction runs north and south. The northernmost of these valleys, that of the Tāngan, has on its west the *bāring* which touches the Mahānandā at Mālda: its length is about 30 miles and in places it extends to several miles in width. The river (Tāngan) winds circuitously through the valley and meets the Mahānandā at Muchia Aihō, at which point the waterway of the railway bridge is 200 feet: in 1807, when Dr. Buchanan Hamilton completed his manuscript, the point of junction was at Ahorganj, seven miles further south. The position of the remains of an embanked road and stone bridge at Rāniganj, a hunting seat of the kings of Gour, shows also that there have been variations in the course of the river at that place. A small stream joins the river near Pāmongolā from the west: higher up at Nālāgolā the channel has been canalised in places and a navigable connection established with the Pārnabhābā. The latter river has a valley similar to that of the Tāngan through which it winds till it joins the Mahānandā at Makrampur about a mile below Rohanpur, at which place a small stream from the east falls into it. The waterway of the railway bridge at Rohanpur is 200 feet. Both the Tāngan and the Pārnabhābā have steep banks, particularly where they pass through *bāring* formation; their average width is about 40

The  
Tāngan  
and  
Pārna-  
bhābā

The  
Pārna-  
bhābā



yards. Mention has already been made of the way in which they expand over their valleys in the rains.

On the right bank of the Mahānandā are two channels with mouths opposite Gumāstāpur and Nawābganj, which connect through the *bils* (swamps) with a channel called the Jaharpur Dāra. This latter channel runs into the Paglā at Kānsāt and appears to be a natural formation artificially deepened to admit of the passage of large boats in the rainy season between the Mahānandā and the Paglā. At the present time the channels from the Mahānandā have silted so considerably as to make through navigation possible only in years of high flood.

#### SWAMPS

A feature of the drainage of the district is the line of swamps (*bils*) which extends along the right bank of the Mahānandā from the Kālindri past the east face of Gaur right down to opposite Nawābganj. Of these the largest is the Batiya *bil* near Bholābāt. North of the Kālindri the *bils*, though smaller in size, continue both parallel to the Mahānandā and also between the Kālindri and the railway line up to the Ratua *tāl*.

#### GEOLOGY

The district is covered by alluvium. The *bāriād* belongs to an older alluvial formation, which is usually composed of massive argillaceous beds of a rather pale reddish-brown hue, often weathering yellowish, disseminated throughout which occur *kunkar* and pisolithic ferruginous concretions. The low-lying country to the west of the Mahānandā and in the south is of more recent formation, consisting of sandy clay and sand along the course of the rivers and fine silt consolidating into clay in the flatter parts of the river plain. West of the Mahānandā a formation similar to that of the older alluvium of the *bāriād* outcrops for three or four miles northwards from Kendaram railway station: it is also found underlying, near the surface, part of the *tāl* in that direction showing that the present surface of the district is the result of denudation of the old alluvium of North Bengal, between which and the Rājmahāl Hills the Ganges and other Himalayan water has forced its way south from the west.

#### FAUNA

Hunter remarks that "Mālda has always been celebrated for the unusual quantity of large game which it affords and especially for its tiger hunting." Their breeding grounds were the *kātdi* (thorny scrub jungle of the *bāriād*) and the jungle-covered ruins of Gaur and Pandua: their hunting grounds the grassy swamps which cover such considerable areas of the district and stretch away into Purnea and Dinājpur towards the hills. The last three decades have, however, seen the district

cut off for wild animals from the Terai by the construction of the sub-Himalayan railways, and the jungles cleared and their inhabitants exterminated by the Sonthals and Pahāriās, who have crossed the Ganges in large numbers to settle in the *bāring* and other parts of the country. At the present time a tiger is somewhat of a rarity and is invariably a wanderer. The carnivora of the district are now represented by leopards and other smaller species. The ungulata comprise hog-deer and wild pig.

Leopards are fairly common, particularly in the vicinity of English Bazar and Mālda, where the undergrowth in the mango gardens and the deep ditches of the mulberry fields give them sufficient shelter. The Gaur variety is larger than the ordinary leopard of the village jungles, but has now become rare. The depredations of these animals are usually confined to cattle, pigs, goats, village dogs, jackals and monkeys. Some years ago there was a man-eating leopard near English Bazar which carried off seven boy cow-herds before it was destroyed. Hog-deer are scarce, a few are to be found in the Shirshi and Singābāl jungles. Wild pigs, though not in great numbers, are common and do some injury to crops.

The game birds of the district are jungle fowl, swamp and black partridge, button quail, green pigeon, pea-fowl and lesser florican, the last two being somewhat rare. Two varieties of geese are found, the bar-headed and pink-beaked, and among ducks the brahminy, mallard, red-headed pochard, pin-tail, merganser, pearl-eyed and grey are the most common. Besides these there are found the common blue-winged teal, whistling teal, cotton teal, grey and golden plovers, four varieties of snipe and the usual waders of Bengal.

Game  
Birds

The rivers and *bils* of Mālda contain quantities of fish, of which may be mentioned the mullet, *rāhu*, *kutta*, *chital*, *sir*, *boail*, *nanin*, *magor*, *saul*, *hilsa*, and varieties of crabs, prawns, eels, turtles, and rays. *Bhekti* are sometimes met with. Snub-nosed or man-eating crocodiles are very plentiful, particularly in the tanks and ponds of Gaur. The fish-eating alligator or *ghariāl* is common in the rivers, where also porpoises abound. Otters are common in the *bils*.

Fish

The flora of Mālda is merely a small portion of that extending from the Kosi to the Brahmaputra, an alternation of *bils* and village shrubberies with the drier jungle of the *bāring* formation. Where the ground is not occupied by the usual crops of Northern Bengal, it is covered by an abundant natural vegetation except in the sandy beds of the greater rivers, where the few annual plants that establish themselves are

BOTANY.

swept away by the floods of the following season. Old river beds, however, ponds and marshes, and streams with a sluggish current have a copious vegetation of *Vallisneria* and other plants. Land subject to inundation has usually a covering of *Tamarix* and reedy grasses, and in some parts where the ground is more or less marshy *Rosa involucreta* is plentiful; few trees occur on these inundated lands; the most plentiful and largest is the *hijāl* (*Barringtonia acutangula*). Portions of the *bārand* are covered by the jungle locally known as *kātāl*. This consists chiefly of thorny scrub bush-jungle mixed with an abundance of *pipal* (*Ficus religiosa*), *bar* or *bat* (*Ficus indica*), *simul* and *pakur* trees and *nipal* bamboos. A species of thorny bamboo known as *beurbans* is common in Pandua, and there is a considerable wood of *sal* near Pakurhāt: palmyra trees are also common. Near villages, thickets or shrubberies of semi-spontaneous more or less useful trees of a rapid growth and weedy character, are usual and sometimes extensive, in addition to the ordinary *nim*, jack fruit trees, tamarind, bamboo, *pipal* and mango. Dense thickets of this nature are a feature of the uncleared embankments of Gaur. The western half of the district is particularly suited to the growth of mulberry and mango, for the last named of which Mālda is famous. In the wide fields of the *diāra* the *babul* and *ber* trees are fairly plentiful; both are in demand for their hard wood suitable for cart wheels, whilst on the second, lac is grown. Of other trees common in this western half of the district may be particularised the date palm and the palmyra palm.

## CLIMATE

The year is divided into the three usual seasons. The rains commence about the middle of June and continue into October, the middle of July to the middle of September being the period of greatest rainfall. The cold season lasts from the beginning of November till the middle of February: in December and January the cold after sundown is such as to make a fire agreeable. The cold weather disappears with the coming of the *paschima* or west winds which are usual in March and April. In May and June the air becomes stagnant and oppressive as the wind changes to the east.

## Winds

From the middle of March to the middle of May there are strong winds from the west, hot and interrupted by squalls, generally accompanied by thunderstorms, rain and often by hail of a great size. From the middle of May to the rainy season winds are light and from the east. During the rains the wind is from the south veering to the east at their close. The prevailing wind in the cold weather is north.

The months from November to April are dry and fine, the *rainfall* normal rainfall of each being under one inch. The monsoon breaks normally in the middle of June, the months of heaviest rainfall being July, August and September, with mean rainfalls of 13·40, 11·18 and 11·19 inches, respectively. The mean rainfall for the cold weather, hot weather and rains for the years 1892 to 1911 recorded at English Bāzār was 1·66, 6·33 and 48·95 inches, respectively, the annual mean rainfall being 56·94.

Mean temperature increases from 63° in January to 86° in May, the average for the year being 78°. The highest mean maximum is 97° in April and the lowest 50° in January. TEMPERATURE

## CHAPTER II.

## HISTORY.

THE district of Mālda contains within its limits the sites of Pandua and Gaur, the capital cities of Bengal throughout mediæval times. The two towns are almost equidistant north and south from English Bāzār and on opposite sides of the Mahānandā, Gaur being on the western and Pandua on the eastern. They contain some of the most interesting remains now to be found in Bengal. The early history of both these cities, as of the kingdoms of which they formed part, is very obscure. It is still uncertain which of them is the older. If, however, the claims of Pandua to identity with Paundranagar be admitted, Pandua is the older town, epitomizing as a ruling city the Bengal of early history when the foreign influences with which it was in contact were from the east and north. Similarly Gaur stands for Aryan and Buddhistic rule, followed in later times by the Brahminism of the early middle ages. Later both cities were for five centuries the centres of Mahomedan rule in the province. Their history is consequently the history of Bengal from the earliest times till the 17th century.

Of the district as apart from these towns it may be said it has no history. A characteristic feature of Hindu and Mahomedan rule in Bengal was its purely autocratic nature; the ruling dynasties were the heads of bodies of fighting men who were constantly renewed from outside the province. In districts remote from the royal headquarters the king's man would establish a sort of local kingship which, with the help of forces locally raised, might defy the king's rule and in periods of weakness of the central power establish petty independent kingdoms. In the immediate vicinity, however, of the capital the power of the king always prevented the rise of these local kinglets. In fact, the only tradition in the district of a small local raja is that connected with the high land near the Kendaran railway station which is said to have been the site of a palace of such a kinglet. Of the population of the towns of Gaur and Pandua a considerable proportion was certainly formed by the military and official elements on which depended

the artisan and trading classes. Practically nothing is known of the industries of the towns, but it may be conjectured that from their position on the main river route between Bengal and Western India they were the entrepôts of the trade of the province; it may be observed that the words Gaur and Pandua have been interpreted as deriving from the sugar trade of these towns.

That portion of the district, the *bāṛind* or Bārendrabhūm of the Sen dynasty, in which Pandua lies, comes into history earlier as part of the kingdom of Panduavardhana. As is the case with the rest of Bengal, no mention is made of it in the epics of India except as an abode of barbarians. It is generally stated that Panduavardhana takes its name from a people known as the Pods, of Mongoloid extraction. Wilson connects the Pods with the modern caste of Puro, whose original occupation was sugar boiling and who are to be found in some numbers as silk-worm-rearers in the district. Subsequently the country was overrun by Koch tribes and afterwards by a tribe known as Bhars. At one time it was connected with a kingdom to the west, of which the inhabitants were the forebears of the modern Ganesh caste. The chief city of the kingdom was Paundranagar which is identified by some authorities with Pandua. With the consolidation and extension of the Aryan power from Magadha the country became merged politically in the empires which centred on that province, and inter-penetrated with Aryan influences under Aryan rulers and immigrants. Buddhism became the religion of its rulers and continued to be so after the break-up of these empires, when the province appears as a petty principality. The Chinese traveller Hsien Tsang, who visited India from 629 to 645 A. D., describes Panduavardhana as a kingdom of 700 miles circumference, the capital having a circumference of 5 miles. He makes no mention of any independent ruler. The traveller speaks of the number of the tanks, the redness of the soil and of the way in which the dwelling-houses have their walls made of earth, all of which suggests that he is referring to this part of the *bāṛind*, though the distances he gives from the Ganges makes the identification of Paundranagar with Pandua somewhat difficult.

Pandu-  
vardhana

The really authenticated history of Pandua begins in Mahomedan times with the removal of the capital there from Gaur by Shamsuddin Ilyās Shāh about the year 1353 A. D. The reason assigned for its choice as the capital at that time is that its position, with rivers and swamps protecting it from

attack from every side but the north, made it a suitable defensive position against the attacks of the Delhi Emperor with whom the Afghan king of Gaur was at war. Hunter in the Statistical Account takes accordingly the view that Pandua is a later city than Gaur, merely a military outpost of the Mahomedan kings of Gaur, which, with the fort of Ekdālā, 20 miles further north, protected Gaur from the tribes of the north-east and gave a safe asylum against attacks from the west, and that it was constructed with material from Gaur. It is the existence, however, of Hindu remains incorporated, with little or no alteration, in Mahomedan buildings which distinguish the buildings of Pandua from those of Gaur. It is unlikely that the Hindu and Buddhistic remains to be found in Pandua should have been brought from Gaur to the almost utter obliteration of such remains in the latter place. These remains are found over large areas in Dinājpur district also, whereas they are comparatively uncommon in Mālda district proper. It is accordingly argued that in reality Pandua is the Paundranagar of antiquity and of the traveller Hiuen Tsang, and that the Mahomedan builders merely quarried the site of the older city for material. General considerations adduced in support of this view are that the number of tanks existing, made in pre-Mahomedan times, as their longer sides running from north to south attest, show that this particular tract of country must have been well populated and flourishing. In those times the valleys of the Purnabhābā and the Tāngau, as their size shows, must have been occupied by rivers of much greater volume than those now existing: at the same time the Ganges united with the Mahānandā above Pandua. What more natural than that Pandua, on hard soil and elevated above flood level, should have been the site of the capital of a well-watered and healthy region. The site of Paundranagar has, however, been identified by different authorities with other places, of which one, Mahasthan in Bogra district, lies in the *bāring*. It is known that during the time of the Pal kings the use of carved black stone in public buildings spread over the *bāring*. It may be that the stones now found in Pandua were collected from a distance from these buildings, bearing in mind that they are used only as ornamentation or facing for brick-work and only comparatively small quantities were required.

Gaur or Gauda does not appear at any time to have been the name of any considerable tract of country in Bengal. The origin of the name is obscure; several other places in India

of historical importance bear the same name. Cunningham in the Archaeological Reports connects the word with *gur* (molasses) and thinks it probable that the city of Gaur was originally a great sugar mart.

Sasanka who flourished about 606 A. D. was known as the king of Karna-subarna, the riverain tracts of the Padma, as well as king of Gauda. It is not till the time of the Pāla kings of Bengal that the history of Gaur in Bengal as a place in contradistinction to its use as a title for kings becomes clearer. The Pāla kings apparently established themselves originally in Bihar, and later founded the city of Gaur on the south of the Kālindri and some miles to the north of the existing site. It was the principal city, or at any rate an important city, in their kingdom, which comprised Bihar and most of modern Bengal. The position on land above flood level at the confluence of the Mahānandā and the Kālindri through which the main stream of the Ganges passed, lent itself to the strategic control of the communications between Bengal and the west, and in later days, the Mahomedan invaders equally recognised its advantages for that purpose. If Pandua be the old capital of Paundravardhana, the new capital merely meant the shifting to the nearest suitable place for building of the site of that city to follow the recession of the main stream of the Ganges from the vicinity of Pandua.

The Pāla kings, whose dynasty begins at the end of the 8th century of the Christian era, were originally Buddhists, though the later members of the family became Hindus under Brahminical influences. Most of the stone-work bearing traces of Buddhistic art to be found in the ruins of the district belongs to their rule. The little that is known of the history of the period is mainly derived from inscriptions on copper and stone of which a number has been found in recent years in the modern district of Mālda and its neighbours. Many of these inscriptions refer to grants of land, and from them it is possible to reconstruct roughly the succession of Pāla kings. Among tablets found in the district may be mentioned that of Dharma-pāla of date about 800 A. D. and which was discovered at Khalimpur near Gaur in 1893. Other important kings of the dynasty were Narayan Pāla (900—925 A. D.) and Mahipāla (980—1035 A. D.). It was in the reign of Mahipāla, about 1030 A. D., that a famous gathering of Buddhistic monks attended by envoys from Thibet took place.

The Pāla dynasty was supplanted, after reigning for 300 years, by the Sen Rajas at the beginning of the 11th century.

Pāla  
Dynasty

Sen  
Dynasty



The first member of the Sen line of kings, Samanta Sen, is vaguely described as Brahma-khatriya by caste. His great-grandson, Ballāl Sen, the most famous Hindu King of Bengal, was reigning in Gaur in 1169 as ruler of Bengal and Mithila. The fame of Ballāl Sen rests mainly on the institution of Kulnism. This measure appears to have been an attempt to solve the problem of the social and religious confusion which had arisen in the dominant Aryan ruling classes from their contact with local beliefs, the pressure of Brahminism reinforced by fresh immigration from the west, and the legacy of the long period of Buddhism. The modern stereotyped separation of each of the higher castes of Bengal into Rarh and Bardra divisions is amongst the results of the policy of Ballāl, though in its inception that policy seems to have aimed at establishing an hierarchy based on the merits of the individual, and not on geographical distribution. In any case, the comparative ease with which the Mahomedan invaders overran Bengal in the succeeding reign suggests that the policy failed to close the ranks even of the Aryan section of the population, much less to form the foundation for a union between the masses of the population and their Hindu rulers.

Of public works dating from the reign of Ballāl there still remain the Sāgardighi tank and the ramparts of Gaur near Sādullāpur.

Lakshman Sen, the son of Ballāl, gave his name in the form of Lakshnauti or Lakshmanavati to the northern suburbs of Gaur. The site of his palace is pointed out near English Bāzār on the Rājmahāl road. He was the last of the Hindu kings of Gaur, for in 1194 he was overthrown at Nadia by Mahomed Ibn Bakhtiyār Khilji, the Lieutenant of the Delhi Emperor, who led the Mahomedan invasion of Bengal. It is said that Lakshman was told by his advisers that his kingdom would be overthrown by the Turkis or Mahomedans led by a warrior whose arms reached down to his knees, a physical peculiarity of Bakhtiyār, and on this account a less spirited resistance was made to the invaders.

Mahomedan Rule

Bakhtiyār Khilji made his headquarters at Gaur and from that centre established Mahomedan rule over the greater part of Northern and Central Bengal, and attempted to subjugate Assam and Bhutan. After the death of Bakhtiyār Khilji a succession of Pathān chiefs, adventurers with Bakhtiyār, seized the throne, professing allegiance to Delhi as they were compelled. It may be said that the kings were elected by the Mahomedan fighting chiefs from amongst their numbers when they

were not imposed on them from Delhi. Of these chiefs who became kings may be mentioned Ghiyāsaddīn Khilji, who ruled from 1211 to 1227 A. D. He constructed an embanked road for military purposes from Rājnagar in Birbhum through Mālda to Debcote in Dinājpur. A portion of this road forms part of the present Rājmaḥāl road near English Pāzār. Ghiyāsaddīn is said to have corresponded with the Caliphs of Bagdad through the Arab traders who visited Bengal by sea. He invaded Kamrup, Orissa and Bihar and an expedition was sent against him by the Emperor Altamash under the leadership of his son Nāsiraddīn. Ghiyāsaddīn was defeated and killed under the ramparts of Gaur and Nāsiraddīn became Governor in 1227.

The period of direct dependence on Delhi lasted till the middle of the 14th century : in this time the Mahomedan power was consolidated at Gaur and had pushed forward to found a new kingdom in East Bengal which control on Sonargaon, of which the rulers were relatives or tributaries of the Gaur king. Resistance to the power of Gaur came mainly from Orissa. An episode in the history of Gaur in these times is an attack on it about the middle of the 13th century by the king of Orissa. Timur Khan, the Governor of Oudh, was sent by Imperial orders to assist Tughan Khan, an ex-Tartar slave who had been appointed Governor of Gaur from Delhi. Timur Khan arrived after the invaders had retreated with their plunder. A dispute arose between the two Governors, and in spite of attempts at mediation a battle was fought beneath the ramparts of Gaur, in which Tughan was defeated. Timur seized Gaur and ruled till his death (1246 *circa*). It is recorded that he died the same night as Tughan Khan, who had been made Governor of Oudh. Timur was followed by a succession of Governors, who were engaged chiefly in extending their power over the confines of Eastern Bengal. An incident in the Governorship of Izzaddīn Balban was an attack by Tajaddīn Arsalan Khan, the Imperial Governor of Kerah, who plundered Gaur. He was, however, captured and killed by Izzaddīn on the latter's return from an expedition against some of the independent rajas of Eastern Bengal. Mahomed Tartar Khan, the son of Tajaddīn, subsequently became Governor, being succeeded by Sher Khan and Amin Khan. Tughral, the Lieutenant of Amin Khan, rebelled against and imprisoned the latter, proclaiming himself king of Bengal under the title of Mughisaddīn. It would appear that Tughral had rebelled on the news of the illness, which he thought would prove fatal, of the Emperor Balban, whose slave he had been. The Emperor recovered and marched against Gaur, declaring :

"We are playing for half my kingdom, and I will never return to Delhi, nor even mention its name till the blood of the rebel and his followers has been shed." Tughrāl Khan having been defeated and slain, Balban proceeded to teach the people of Gaur a sharp lesson on the dangers of revolt, the memory of which lasted for several generations. Gibbets were set up on both sides of the main street of the city for over two miles, and on them men, women and children were hanged, for days together, after indescribable tortures. The Emperor Balban then bestowed Bengal on his own son Nāsiraddīn Bugram Khan, on whose death Kādir Khān was appointed Viceroy, from Delhi. Eastern Bengal was at that time a separate Governorship, with its capital at Sonargaon, near Dacca. In 1338 A. D., on the death of the Governor of Eastern Bengal, his armour-bearer proclaimed himself king under the title of Mubarak Shāh. He attacked and killed Kādir Khān but was himself defeated by Ali Mubarak who had been in Kādir's service. Ali Mubarak established himself in Gaur under the title of Ali Shāh, and after a reign of six years was assassinated by his foster-brother, Hāji Ilyās. The latter took the title of Shāmsud-dīn Ilyās Shāh and reunited Eastern Bengal under Gaur, by defeating the ruler of that province. He attempted to extend his rule to the west and drew upon himself an attack from the Emperor Firōz Shāh. He transferred his capital to Pandua and was there besieged, but retreated to the fort of Ekdālā, 20 miles north of Pandua. After several years' fighting in the vicinity of old Mālda the Emperor made terms with him, and recognised his independence about the year 1357. The Court name of Pandua whilst it was the capital of Bengal was Firōzābād, which during this period regularly appears on the coins in place of Lakhnauti. Sikandar Shāh, the eldest son of Hāji Ilyās, succeeded his father on the throne, and reigned for 30 years. He built the great Adinah mosque at Pandua and was killed near Old Mālda in a battle with his rebellious son Ghiyāsaddīn, the ruler of Sonargaon. His name has been perpetuated in the measure of length known as the *Sikandar gaj* (yard); on account of his great height, he was himself known as Sikandar Chauhatta (four *kats*). His reign was one of great prosperity. One of his most prominent subjects was the Mahomedan saint Alai ul Huk, the father of Hazrat Nur Kutb Alam and the spiritual successor of Makhdam Akhi Sarāfjaddīn, all three famous holy men of the district. His son Ghiyāsaddīn, who succeeded him, was the patron of Hazrat Nur Kutb Alam, whose foundation still exists at Pandua and with

whom he is said to have studied theology at Rājnagar in Birbhum. It is recorded of Ghiyāsaddīn that one day, whilst shooting arrows for recreation, he killed a widow's son accidentally. The widow complained to the Kazi at Pandua and the king was summoned and ordered to pay compensation. The king complied with the order and told the Kazi that if there had been any hesitation in making it on account of the rank of the accused, he, the king, would have cut him to pieces with his sword. The Kazi retorted that if the king had not complied with the order, he would have had him flogged in the usual way in default. Ghiyāsaddīn was a patron of the arts and sent an embassy to invite the Persian poet Hafiz to his court at Pandua. His death was followed by a few years of civil war till Raja Ganesh, a Hindu zamindar of Dinājpur, established himself (1404 *circa*) as king in Pandua with the help of the saint Nur Kutb Alam. Raja Ganesh was greeted at Pandua as the restorer of Hindu rule in Bengal, and according to Mahomedan annalists persecuted the people of their faith and murdered a number of the leading men of the community. His oppressions led Nur Kutb Alam to invite the Sultan of Jaunpur to interfere. The Sultan invaded Bengal and put the Raja in such peril that he begged Nur Kutb Alam to order the Sultan to withdraw, promising to let his youthful son Jadu be converted to Islamism. The saint agreed, converted the boy and made the Sultan of Jaunpur withdraw. The Raja thereupon sought to put Jadu back into caste by having him passed through a cow made of gold, the material of which was divided amongst the Brahmins who conducted the ceremony. The boy, being converted by such a learned saint as Nur Kutb Alam, did not apostatise and succeeded his father in 1414 as a Mahomedan king of Bengal under the name of Jalāladdīn.

Jalāladdīn himself lived in Gaur, though he spent large sums of money in embellishing Pandua which, according to the annalists, flourished in his reign beyond description. His tomb with that of his wife and son is at Pandua, in the Eklākhi Mausoleum. The spread of Mahomedanism amongst the peoples of Eastern Bengal is ascribed to his oppressive measures to that end. He was succeeded by his son Ahmed Shah, who sent an embassy to the Tartar Emperor Shah Rukh at Herat to solicit protection against the Sultan of Jaunpur. This request was acknowledged by the despatch of Mulana Abdul Rahim as ambassador to the Court of Gaur, and an order to Jaunpur to cease his aggression. Ahmed was assassinated as the result of a court conspiracy against him caused by his cruelties and the

family of Hāji Ilyās re-established itself on the throne in the person of Nāsiraddīn, in whose reign (1434 *circa*) the Kotwali gate in Gaur was built. His son Fārbak Shāh introduced Abyssinian slaves into his army and formed of them a corps of Janissaries. Fārbak seems to have been a strong ruler and Gaur had prosperity till his death in 1478. After him, however, there was a period of frequent change of rulers, due to the intrigues of the Abyssinian guards, which ended finally in the accession of an Abyssinian army chief, Fīrōz Shāh, who reigned for 13 years till 1470. He built the Fīrōz *minār* in Gaur and several mosques. The *minār* is supposed to have been erected to commemorate the victories of Fīrōz Shāh. As regards its building the story runs that the king's builder boasted to him that he could have made the *minār* higher if he had the material. He had not in fact asked for more material. The king promptly had the builder thrown from the top of the *minār* and turning angrily to a servant told him to go to Margaon. The servant proceeded to obey and on the way consulted a person whom he met as to what he was to do at Margaon. This person, after hearing what had occurred, suggested that the king wanted masons from Margaon, where the best masons lived. The servant acted on the surmise, which proved correct. The expression "going to Margaon" has become proverbial to describe a person with a hazy idea of what he has to do.

After the death of Fīrōz there was a further period of usurpation of the throne by intriguers with the royal guards till Hossain Shāh established himself in 1494. At the beginning of his reign the troops sacked Gaur as a reward for their assistance to the king, but shortly after this the king found means to disband these guards. A section of them known as Paiks were settled in Midnapore, and their descendants gave trouble there to the English at the end of the 18th century. Hossain Shāh ruled for 27 years and completely restored the fortunes of Gaur, so much so that Gaur became a synonym for Bengal and Gauriya for its inhabitants. The increase of wealth in Gaur is said to have made the use of gold and silver vessels on festive occasions quite common.

It was in the reign of Hossain Shāh in the year 1509 that the famous religious reformer Chaitanya Deb became a *sunyasi* and founded the *chaitany* cult. This religious movement, which after Kulinism has most profoundly determined the distinctive Hinduism of Bengal, found two prominent adherents in Gaur in the highly placed officers, the brothers Rup and

Sanatan, who left their homes and positions to follow Chaitanya to Brindaban. Chaitanya himself visited Ramkel near Gaur, where Rup and Sanatan lived. The well-known *hairagi mela* at Ramkel perpetuates their memory. Another great disciple of Chaitanya was Nityananda, from whom derives the local Goewami family of Gayeshpur.

The story of Haridas, one of Chaitanya's followers, is that he was sent before the Kazi-ul-kazi of Gaur to be tried for the crime of being converted from Mahomedanism to the new doctrine. He was sentenced to be scourged through each of the 22 bazars of Gaur and his dead body thrown into the river. The executioners, for whom he prayed before losing consciousness, threw his body into the Ganges after carrying out the first part of the sentence and were so astonished to find that he was thrown up on the bank still alive that they allowed him to go free.

Hossain Shāh built the Dakhil gate of the fort in Gaur, and the tomb of Akhi Serajuddin at Sādullāpur. He also endowed the tomb of the saint Hazrat Nur Kuth Alam at Pandua with a large amount of land—the Bais-hazari endowment—which still survives. Literature was represented in his reign by, amongst others, the Bengali poet Chandi Das. He waged successful war against what is now Cooch Behar and also against Orissa, but his attempts to extend his power in Bihar were checked by Sikandar Lodi.

He was succeeded by his son Nasrat Shāh who married the daughter of the Afghan Emperor of Delhi and gave shelter to the chiefs of that dynasty after it had been overthrown at Panipat (1526) by the Moghuls under Babar. This drew upon him the hostility of the Moghuls, who advanced against him twice, but on each occasion invasion was averted by Nasrat's submission and payment of tribute. During his reign the Baradarwāzi mosque and the Kadam Rasul were built in Gaur. Nasrat was assassinated in 1532 A. D., a fate which shortly after befell his son and successor at the hands of his uncle Mahmud Shāh III. In 1537 A. D. the Pathan adventurer, Sher Khan, later the Emperor Sher Shāh, who had established himself in Bihar, advanced against Gaur, which he took and sacked. In the history of Faria da Souza it is related that Mahmud applied to the Portuguese for assistance against Sher Khan, but that the squadron of nine ships sent to his aid did not arrive in Bengal till after the surrender of the city. It is said that at the time of the siege of Gaur there were Portuguese prisoners from Chittagong in Gaur. The historian

goes on to describe Gaur from hearsay as "the principal city of Bengal seated on the banks of the Ganges, three leagues in length, containing one million and two hundred thousand families and well fortified. Along the streets, which are wide and straight, are rows of trees to shade the people, who are so very numerous that sometimes many are trod to death."

Mahmud also applied for assistance to the Emperor Humayun, who invaded Bengal and retook Gaur shortly after Mahmud's death. Mahmud was buried at Sādullāpur and with him died the last independent king of Bengal.

From this time may be dated the beginning of the decline of Gaur: it lost its strategic importance as the power of Delhi extended eastward, whilst at the same time a period of development of trade and commerce in Bengal was commencing with the coming of the Portuguese and other traders from the west. This trade gradually introduced a good deal of wealth in the form of specie into Lower Bengal, and the province from being in the eyes of Delhi poor and unprofitable gradually became a steady source of considerable revenue which repaid attention. As that wealth was coming into Lower Bengal it was inevitable that that portion of the province should so increase in importance as to necessitate the transfer of the local government to it.

Humayun remained for some three months in Gaur enjoying its amenities. He renamed it Jannatābād (the city of Heaven) as he disliked the word Gaur, which resembled in sound the Hindustani word for a grave. In the meantime Sher Khan had retreated to the south on Humayun's advance and, taking advantage of the latter's inactivity, worked back to Bihar through Chota Nagpur and barred Humayun's communication with Delhi. Humayun was forced to fight and sustained a severe defeat, which enabled Sher Khan to recapture Gaur and make good his rule over Bihar and Bengal. Later, in 1540, Sher Khan again defeated Humayun and made himself Emperor. He appointed Khizr Khan as his Governor in Gaur and on the attempt of Khizr Khan to make himself independent, Sher Khan defeated him and divided Bengal into several provinces to which he appointed his Lieutenants. In the re-organisation of the provinces, Sher Shāh introduced the fiscal division of the pargana into Bengal: that in which Gaur lies bears the name Sherashābād. The revenue was assessed at one quarter of the gross produce. Another reform was the introduction of a system of posts between Sonargaon and Delhi, horses being used to convey the royal mails.



Of the many stories locally current about Sher Shāh and his justice whilst King of Bengal, one is that his son was riding through Gaur on an elephant and made an insulting gesture to the wife of a local inhabitant whom he happened to see from the howdah in the inner courtyard of her house. The husband complained to the king who ordered that his son's wife should be publicly subjected to the same indignity from the hands of the complainant. The king finally yielded to the protests of his courtiers that two blacks would not make a white and made his son humbly sue for pardon.

After Sher Shāh's death in 1545 Mahomed Khan, who had been appointed Governor of Bengal by the new Emperor, proclaimed his independence and invaded Jaunpur, but was defeated and killed by the Emperor's general Himm. His son Bahadur Shāh, however, established himself at Gaur and died there. In the two years succeeding his death there were three kings of Gaur, the last of whom was assassinated by Taj Khan Kerani, brother of Sulaiman Kerani of Bihar. On the death of Taj Khan, Sulaiman seized Gaur in 1563. He removed the capital to Tanra or Tauda on account of the unhealthiness of Gaur itself. This name is borne still by a piece of land in the vicinity of Lakhipur on the road from Gaur to Rājmahāl. All traces of the town have been lost in the changes of the Ganges, but it is supposed to have been situated to the south-west of Gaur on one of the *chars* formed by the Ganges. The chief event in the reign of Sulaiman was the war with Raja Mukunda Deb of Orissa whom he defeated by means of his general Kalapahar, a Brahmin convert to Islamism. Sulaiman died in 1573 and was succeeded by his son Dawad Khan, who entered into hostilities with the Emperor Akbar.

Akbar's general Munaim Khan drove him out of Tanra into Orissa, and being impressed by the splendours of Gaur made his headquarters at that place. A pestilence broke out in which thousands died, including Munaim Khan, in 1573. Gaur became depopulated and practically deserted as a result of this pestilence which is generally believed to have been some form of malarial, probably due to the recession of the main stream of the Ganges from the city front. A Mahomedan historian writes: 'Thousands died daily; the living were wearied with burying the dead. Corpses of Hindus and Mahomedans were thrown into the swamps, the tanks and into the Bhāgirathi. This created a stench which only intensified the disease. The few people that survived the plague left the city, which was never again populated to any extent. At the time of its



destruction it was the most magnificent city in India, of immense extent and filled with noble buildings. It was the capital of a hundred kings, the seat of wealth and luxury; it had existed 2,000 years. In one year it was humbled to the dust and now is the abode of monkeys and leopards.'

Dr. Buchanan Hamilton states, however, that the later Moghul Viceroys of Bengal used occasionally to reside at the fortified palace of Gaur while Tanra continued to be their headquarters. The loss of population and complete decline of Gaur appears from a passage in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations Voyages* in which Ralph Fitch mentions that they passed the 'country of Gauron where we found but few villages; but almost all wilderness and saw many buffs, swine and deers grass longer than a man and very many tigers.'

Owing to the death of Munaim Khan and the depletion of his forces, the Moghuls withdrew for a short time from Bengal. This gave Dawad and his Pathan chiefs an opportunity to re-establish themselves in the district, but they were quickly overcome and Dawad killed in 1576. The Subadars of Bengal continued till the time of Raja Man Singh (1589) to have their headquarters at Tanra and from that place occupied themselves in putting down the recalcitrant Pathans of Bengal. The place was disliked by them on account of its unhealthiness, and at the same time the fact that most of their fighting had to be done on the fringes of Bengal to the east and south, where the Pathans had retired to East Bengal and Orissa, tended to make the district an inconvenient base for military operations. Raja Man Singh accordingly made his headquarters at Rājmaḥāl on the opposite side of the Ganges, and from there operated in Bengal, but in 1608 Islan Khan, the then Subadar, removed the headquarters to Dacca, which place became the administrative capital of Bengal Province.

Tanra appears again in history as the place in which the Governor Shāh Shujā, retreating before the forces of his brother, the Emperor Aurangzeb, spent the rains of 1660. It is recorded of Shāh Shujā that he contemplated restoring Gaur and its palace, but his plans, whatever they were, came to nothing with his defeat.

At the end of the 17th century Gaur had become, like Pandua, a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts, and the district an obscure portion of the Province.

The East India Company early established a trade connection with the district, having its factory at Old Mālda where also was a Dutch factory, of which there are still remains.

From Bruce's Annals of the Honourable East India Company it appears that in 1681 the Bengal agents were ordered to send equal proportions of stock to Dacca and Old Mālda. In 1686 the factory was seized by Nawab Saista Khan, Subular of Bengal, and the Company ordered its agents to demand one and a half lakhs of rupees as compensation for the demolition and plundering of the factory. The records of 1748 embody a complaint from the merchant *gumastas* of the Company at Mālda that they were ill-treated by the people of the Nawab. It may be mentioned that the district had a connection with the downfall of the subadars, as after the battle of Plassey in 1757 the Nawab Suraj-ud-doulah fled across the Ganges and took refuge in a place in what is now the Sibganj thānā, from which he was betrayed.

After the dewani or fiscal administration of Bengal had been granted to the Company, a fortified commercial residency was built in 1771 at English Bāzār by Mr. George Henschman. This building is now used as the District Collectorate.

By the end of the 18th century there were a number of European indigo planters in the district, besides the commercial resident and his assistants. Amongst the planters may be mentioned Mr. Creighton of Goamalt, from whose drawings the ruins of Gaur have in recent years been restored. The first systematic exploration of the site of Gaur was made by Mr. Creighton in 1801. Mr. Grant was at that time the factor of the Company at English Bāzār. Letters of an indigo planter, Mr. Andrew Brown, living at English Bāzār at the beginning of the 19th century, have recently been published; we read of the mild excitement in the town at an expected visit from Lord Wellesley when on his way to Calcutta and of the disappointment caused by his journeying through Rājmahāl. Mention is made of the *mali* being soundly beaten at Old Mālda in sectarian riots between Mahomedans and Hindus, for which apparently that place was notorious.

In 1810 Dr. Buchanan Hamilton visited the district and wrote an account of the ruins of Gaur and Pandua, so far as they were accessible.

Up till 1813 the district formed part of the Purnea and Dinājpur districts, the Mahānandā being the boundary, but in that year, in consequence of the prevalence of serious crime in the Kālīchok and Sibganj thānās and on the rivers, a Joint Magistrate and Deputy Collector was appointed at English Bāzār with jurisdiction over a number of police-stations centring on that place and taken from the two districts. In 1832 a separate

treasury was opened, the following year being that of the discontinuance of the Company's trade. In 1859 a full Magistrate and Collector was appointed. Amongst holders of that office may be mentioned Mr. Ravenshaw, after whom the College in Cuttack is named. His illustrated description of Gaur and Pandua was published in 1878.

The district was unaffected by the Sonthal rising and by the Mutiny.

Recent years have seen the total disappearance of the indigo industry and of the filature factories, the clearance of the jungles of the *bārind*, Gaur and Pandua by Sonthals and Paharias, who have crossed the Ganges and settled in the district. Lately there has been a movement of immigration on the part of the Shershābādi Mahomedans, so called from the parganā of Shershābād where they are found in large numbers, into the *duba* and *tāl* lands of the district; this movement has been facilitated by the construction of the railway.

During the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon some of the ruins of Gaur and Pandua were restored, the Viceroy himself visiting the district in connection with the enterprise.

In 1905 the district was transferred from the Bhāgalpur division to the Rājshāhi division on the formation of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. It was formerly a part of the Rājshāhi division, but was transferred from that division to Bhāgalpur in 1876. The district is from 1912 in the Rājshāhi division of Bengal.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE PEOPLE.

THE first census of the district was taken in 1872, when the population of the present district area was 677,328 or a density of 357 persons per square mile.

Between 1872 and 1881 there was an increase of 5 per cent., but an actual decrease in the southern portion of the district west of the Mahānandā; the decrease was attributed to malaria during the latter half of the decade.

Between 1881 and 1891 there was an increase of 14·5 per cent. due mainly to the opening out of the *bāri*nd by the Sonthals and increase of population in the south of the district.

At the census of 1901 the population was found to be 884,030, or an increase of 8·5 per cent., half of which was due to immigration from the Sonthal Parganās. The decade was on the whole unhealthy from malaria and cholera, but there was a considerable increase of population in the south-western thānās, fed partly by immigration from English Bāzār thānā and from Murshidābād.

The decade from 1901 was on the whole healthy except for the prevalence of fever during the years 1905, 1906 and 1907. This was connected with the high prices ruling in those years and the comparatively poor outturn of *bhādai* and *rabi* crops, failure of the mango crops and heavy floods in 1906.

The figures of the 1911 census show a population of 1,004,159, or an increase of 13·5 per cent.: immigration has been constant from the Sonthal Parganās and there has been a considerable increase of population in the *diāra* tracts, especially amongst the Mahomedans known as Shershābādīs. The Ganges has also receded to the west with the result that large numbers of cultivators from Murshidābād have followed their *chars* into the district.

The density of the population according to the census of 1911 is 529 per square mile, being greatest in the *diāra* thānās. The greatest increases are shown by the Gājol and Old Mālda police-station and Habibpur outpost, where Sonthals have settled in thousands and where population is being attracted by the new line of railway.

**Emigration**

There is practically no emigration from the district except into the neighbouring districts. If we leave out the women who marry across the border, the emigration is mainly attributable to the constant changes of jurisdiction caused by variation in the course of the Ganges and to the settlement of the surplus *diāra* population in the vacant *chars* of Purnea west of Ratuā and in the *dūbās* of the Tāngan and Pārnabhābā in Dinājpur.

**Immigration**

Immigration has been on a large scale for the last three decades, chiefly from the Sonthal Parganās, into the high lands of the *bārind* and to some extent of Biharis, who have come for service and settled down to cultivation very largely in the west of Ratuā and Tulsihātā, though they are to be found in every *thānā*.

**Towns and Villages**

The population is mainly rural, being chiefly engaged in agriculture, but the villages vary considerably in size. This is due to the nature of the country west of the Mahānandā. Sites above flood level are comparatively limited, with the result that one village runs into another. Where in addition there is a considerable population of weavers or silk reelers, the village becomes a small town, of which Bholāhāt, Mahādipur, Sibganj, Kaligaon may be cited as examples. In the *bārind*, where the ground is high and agriculture is the sole occupation, the tendency is for the people to remain in small hamlets. About 4 per cent. of the total population is resident in the Municipalities of English Bāzār, Nawābganj and Old Mālda, the remainder being spread over 4,683 villages. The population of Nawābganj town is 21,322, of English Bāzār 14,322 and of Old Mālda 3,750.

**Sexes**

The proportion of sexes is 1,000 males to 1,020 females : the figures for the east and west of the Mahānandā being, respectively, 973 and 1,042 females for 1,000 males. East of the Mahānandā the population is largely of Koch origin, and amongst these castes a deficiency of women is a well-marked phenomenon.

**Language.**

The language of the courts is Bengali, but large numbers of the population (21 per cent.) in the west and north of the district of Biharī origin speak Hindi or a mixture of Hindi and Bengali known as *Khurttā*. Amongst the peoples of Koch affinities the dialect is that of North Bengal. The Sonthals largely retain their own language but are gradually acquiring Bengali. The character in common use and taught in the schools is Bengali : Kaithi is also common.

**Ethnology.**

\* Sir William Hunter remarks that Mālda presents ethnologically the aspect of a border district. The population is

almost evenly divided into Hindus and Mahomedans: the Sonthals, however, constitute about 6 per cent., of which only one-third are returned as Animist by religion.

The proportion of Hindus is greatest in the north and west of the district and of Mahomedans in the south. The Hindus fall into three main divisions: the Bihari castes mostly resident in the *diāra* tracts whose language is Hindi: the castes with affinities in the Koch such as the Rajbanshi, Poli and Deshi found in the north-east and north of the district, and lastly the ordinary castes of Lower Bengal strongest round Gaur and to the south. It will be seen that the distribution of population by religion corresponds with the political history of the district.

Amongst the Mahomedans the differences of nationality are not so well defined, but their affinities are for the most part with the castes of lower Bengal, though it is said that the Mahomedans of the Shershābād parganā of Sibganj police-station, known as Shershābādīs, show traces of descent from the foreign immigration of the time of the Mahomedan dynasties. It would appear, however, that the physical advantages which these people enjoy can be partly ascribed to the healthiness of the climate of the Gangetic *chars*. With the exception of a few high class families of Saiyids, Moghuls and Pathans all the Mahomedans are Sheikhs. Amongst the cultivators, however, the Shershābādīs form a distinct group: there is also a small endogamous body known as the Darbhanga Sheikhs, colonists from the district of Darbhanga. Of the functional groups may be mentioned the Jholahas (weavers), Dhaniyas (carders), Naluas (reed sellers), Nikaris (fishermen) and Kunjras (vegetable sellers). As illustrating the tendency for Mahomedans to form castes mention may be made of Pir-kō-dālīs, the name applied to Beldars professing Mahomedanism.

The higher castes of Bengal are represented to a very limited extent. Of the lower castes in position and influence the Shāhās and Baniks, particularly of Old Mālda, are prominent. It appears that a number of them were returned in the census as Agarwālas. Castes peculiar to the district are Chāsatis and Puros, agriculturists and silk-worm rearers, respectively. Castes mainly found in this district are Ganesh and Gangai, weavers and potters, though also agriculturists.

Most of the Bihari castes permit widow remarriage, as do also the castes of Koch origin, so that the majority of the Hindu inhabitants do not differ in this respect from their Mahomedan neighbours.

Koch  
castes

Of the numerically more important Hindu castes the chief is that comprised by the Koch Rajbansis, Polis and Deshis, who number 63,735. In appearance they are strongly Mongoloid like the Koches, though they deny a common origin. Sir William Hunter says that they lived chiefly by hunting and were averse to leaving their villages or mixing with other people. They now depend entirely on agriculture and are on the whole a prosperous community, which is reflected by the claims that a section of the Polis now make to be Kshattriya by origin. This sub-caste goes by the name of Sadhu as distinguished from the 'Bābu' or ordinary Poli. Its members conform to Hindu custom in respect of forbidding widow remarriage, the avoidance of forbidden food, and restraining their women-folk from attending markets to buy and sell. This movement has made little headway with the Deshis and the Koch Rajbansis, and a feature of the markets and fairs of the eastern part of the district is the number of women who frequent them, wearing their distinctive dress known as the *fāḍā*, a cloth the upper part of which is tied tightly round the body under the armpits leaving the neck and arms bare.\*

Chains

The Chains, who number 43,639, are a caste with Bihari affinities found in large numbers in the *dārā* thānās of the west of the district. They are agriculturists and labourers and practise widow remarriage. They are divided into two sub-castes, Bara and Chhota, which do not intermarry.

Sonthals

The Sonthals in the district number 52,128. Though returned largely as Hindus, they differ in no respect from the people of the Sonthal Parganās, with whom they are constantly in contact. The majority of them are unable to speak Bengali.

Christians

The Christians number 430, nearly all of them Baptists, mostly Sonthal converts. The Mission is of interest, as it was Mr. Grant, the factor of the English Bāzār factory, who brought Dr. Thomas to the district, and through him, William Carey, who settled as an indigo planter on the Tāgan just beyond the present border of the district.

RELIGION,  
MAHOM-  
EDANISM.

All the Mahomedans are Sunnis, and, with the exception of numbers of the Shershābādīs, of the Hānifi persuasion. The prevailing doctrine amongst the Shershābādīs is that known as *Šarāfi*, though different groups are known by such names as *Lāmāshābis*, *Wāhābis*, *Hadayat*. The common feature of these schisms is that they profess to base themselves on the text of the *Koran* and do not adhere to any of the regular schools of doctrine into which the Mahomedan religious world is divided. In practice the adherents of these doctrines object to

taking service and to allowing any marriageable woman to remain unmarried, in addition to acknowledging the ordinary prohibitions amongst Mahomedans in respect of drinking, smoking and usury. In 1869 several prosecutions for waging war against the Queen were instituted against Wāhābis. Of late years, however, it is in such matters as objection to vaccination, which operation some of them characterize as an acknowledgment of the goddess Basanta, that they have come in conflict with the administration.

Apart from the regular Mahomedan festivals such as the Maharam, the Id-ul-Fitr, Id-uz-Zoha and lesser celebrations, the chief local religious festival is that of the Hazrat Pandua *mēlas* or fairs, instituted in connection with the Bāishazāri and Sāshazāri endowments. These *mēlas* are in honour of the saints Makdum Shāh Jalal and Kutub Shāh. The Bāishazāri *mēla* is held from the 17th to 22nd of Rajeb and the chief Sāshazāri *mēla* from the 8th to the 14th of Shaban, the last day coinciding with the festival of the Sab-i-barat. Regulated as all strictly Mahomedan ceremonies are by the lunar year, the dates according to the calendar year fall earlier on each succeeding occasion. The ceremonies consist of the offering of *fātihas*, or prayers for the dead, combined with the distribution of alms and food to the *fakīrs* who assemble on the occasion. Similar ceremonies are performed at the Powal *mēla* at Bāmangolā in March. The Farāzī sects are distinguished in this respect from other Mahomedans in that they repudiate as idolatrous such gatherings in honour of departed saints, stigmatising those who assist at them as Bedātis.

Reference may be made to the Census Report of Bengal for a detailed account of the *pirs* (holy men) who are commonly adored in Bengal. The outward forms of this adoration most commonly seen in Mālda are the small bamboo boats with sails set afloat in the rivers in honour of Khwāja Khijr; the five mounds of earth in honour of the Pānch Pir; the strips of cloth tied in honour of Tena Pir, on trees at the halting places in the *bāring*, by the carters bringing rice from Dinājpur; the models of horses in honour of the Ghorapir to be seen on the roadside by the tombs of departed saints. References to local *pirs* will be found in the succeeding chapters.

Popular  
religion,  
Mahom-  
edanism

Most of the Bengali-speaking Hindu inhabitants profess Baisnabi doctrines and there are numerous Bengali Gosains living at Goyenbari who have numbers of followers amongst the Poli and North Bengal castes. With the worship of Radha and Krishna is, however, mingled that of Kālī. Amongst the

HINDU  
RELIGION.



higher castes the Sakti doctrine with the worship of Durga as in Lower Bengal is commonly found. The Hindi-speaking castes can be described as Saivas, but no hard and fast points of difference can be laid down to differentiate them from their immediate neighbours.

Apart from the ordinary Hindu festivals common to Bengal there is a great gathering of *bairāgis* from Māl̄da and surrounding districts for the Ramkeli *mēla* held in the ruins of Gaur near the Sona Masjid at the end of Jyestha (middle of June). The chief ceremonies are bathing in the tank of Sonātan and worship of Krishna. Advantage is taken of this occasion by *bairāgis* to get married in accordance with the rites prescribed by Chaitanya, and a fee is paid for the marriage to the Gosain, who lives near the tank of Sonātan; this has given rise to the popular saying that the *bairāgi* buys his wife at the Ramkeli *mēla* for Re. 1-4. Most of the *bairāgis* on their way to the *mēla* assemble at Sibganj Tārtipur, where they bathe in the Ganges and worship the god Syam Sarbeswar.

At Jangaltola on the left bank of the Bhāgīrathī and some 7 miles south-west of English Bāzār is a colony of Brahmins, known as Thakuranjis, who observe celibacy. They consider themselves to be *gōpinis* or milkmaids and worship, dressed in women's clothes, Krishna as their incarnate lover. The chief puja is on the last day of Baisakh and is known as the Tulsi Bihar *mēla* at which large numbers of their followers assemble.

By far the most popular festival, however, in this district is that of the Gumbhira. It is celebrated everywhere during the last three days of the Bengal year, the end of Chait, though it is usually carried over into Baisakh and even later. The following is taken from the Census Report. 'The Koches and their congeners worship the Gramya Devata (village godlings) at a curious ceremony called *Gumbhira*, when the young people of the village disguise themselves, personating the deities and dance.' In this district, however, the ceremony is universal amongst low caste Hindus; it is said that it is a form of the Ban Puja introduced by King Ban, whose capital was at Dinājpur. The king was a great worshipper of Siva and used to review at this ceremony the acts done during the year which was passing. The ceremony consisted originally in the annual review of the acts of the year and penance for misdeeds. As now celebrated in this district, a *shamiana* or a hut open on three sides is put up and an image of Siva (Mahadev) installed, before which there is dancing, singing, masquerading and general merriment. It is customary to versify the past year's

events. The following is a verse of the topical song of April 1908 as sung in the *didra* :—

১। বলব কি গান ওহে শিব বাগানে বাই আর।

গাছে গাছে বেড়িয়া দেখছি নুতন পাতা সব সন্ধান ॥

যনে যনে ভাবছি বসে, কাজের কোর পায়না দিশা।

তেল খান চাউলের দর খুব কদা তুমার বেশী দার ॥

আর এক শুন নুতন কাছিনী, ঠিক হুগুহরের শিল আর পানি।

মাঠে হয় কৃষাণ পেরলানী যারিলে গহম ॥

“O Siva what song shall we sing to thee—there are no mangoes in the gardens—as we go from tree to tree nothing but new leaves are seen—our sole thought as we sit is what shall we do—oil, paddy and rice are very dear and also bran: listen again, just at mid-day come hail and rain to harass the farmer and destroy the wheat.”

The allusion is to a severe hailstorm which occurred at the beginning of April that year.

The Sonthals and Mal Paharis, though largely returned as Hindus, practically retain their tribal religious observances and customs, as they are in continuous touch with their brethren across the river, large numbers of whom come annually for the rice planting and cutting seasons, in addition to those who come to make their homes in the district. Animism

The system of social government is the same for Hindus, Mahomedans and Sonthals and appears to be independent of caste. Each village has its headman known as *mandal*, *pramanik* or *mahat* for every separate caste group in it, provided there are more than a few families. It is usual to find in the larger villages that the place of residence of the members of each group is called after the *mandal's* name as so and so's *tola* or *para*. The *mandal* is not ordinarily elected but generally holds the post by descent; he is frequently the money-lender of the community and generally the wealthiest man. So far as perquisites of office go, these are confined chiefly to *pān supāri* on festive occasions, to double allowances at wedding feasts, and he is also a sort of general adviser. Breaches of caste discipline, or morality, petty civil disputes and quarrels are adjudicated on by assemblies of the neighbouring *mandals* constituting a panchayat. These assemblies are known as *lisi*, *bāishi* or *chautishi*, the *bāishi* being the most common. The words mean 3, 22 and 36, respectively, and Social system

it is said that formerly the panchayat consisted of *mandals* of that number of villages. However that may be, it appears that the term *bāishi* is even occasionally applied to designate a single prominent *mandal*. The panchayat assembles at the house of the senior *mandal* and the parties are sent for, and, if the offence be not admitted, are heard and a decision is given. For petty offences the punishment is usually a fine, which amongst some castes is spent on drinking and general feasting and with others devoted to religious purposes, such as the upkeep of a mosque. Payment is enforced by out-casting, which means that no one can marry into the offender's family without incurring the same penalty or smoke or sit with him or visit his house. Amongst the Hindus in cases of caste discipline, the panchayat does not usually seek, or act on, the advice of the Brahmins who minister to the castes.

Amongst the higher castes and classes of the population this elaborate system of caste control does not exist, and even amongst the general mass of the population it is being sapped through the spread of education and diffusion of wealth, and to some extent the influence of the *zamindari* system, but on the other hand the post of *mandal* is much coveted, as it is possible for a man of wealth to get a place amongst them.

The system must be distinguished from the panchayati system of the Chaukidari Act, by which a group of villages is formed into a union and the leading persons constituted into a panchayat responsible for assessment, collection and disbursement of the chaukidari tax and for reporting crime, etc., under the Criminal Procedure Code.

It is also distinct from the village government by the headman, by which the internal economy of the village is regulated in matters of intercaste dealings, although the same individual may act in various capacities.

#### Houses.

The ordinary village house consists of a number of single storied huts of bamboo built on raised plinths of earth round an open yard: in the towns there are a number of brick buildings. The use of corrugated iron has not spread much, mainly owing to the extreme heat in the hot weather, in spite of the fact that at this season of the year, when the dry west winds blow, there are normally extensive fires, whole villages being regularly burnt down. In the *barind* tracts houses are usually built with thick mud walls and thatched roofs, the ceiling being of bamboos with mud laid on them. The outer wall is carried from one hut to the other so as to enclose all the huts forming the homestead, there being only one exit and the

huts opening into a yard inside. Buildings are usually done by the cultivators themselves.

Mention has been made of the peculiar dress worn by the women of the Koch classes. The rest of the people wear the *dhōti* and *sāri* of Lower Bengal, generally of cotton; coats, vests, shoes, and umbrellas are in common use. Ornaments of gold and silver are commonly worn as well as the cheaper ornaments of glass and inferior metals. Dress.

Various forms of drums, wind and string instruments are used by the *Nats* who supply music at religious festivals and weddings. In the towns there are amateur theatrical associations. Arts

The life of the ordinary villager is very simple, the ordinary work in the fields being diversified by journeys to buy silk-worm seed, to cut and buy winter rice and to attend the bigger fairs in addition to the round of local markets and village festivities. The absence of any considerable number of high caste people of the middle classes in the villages has militated against interest being aroused in the outside world. To this day, for example, it is common to hear the district of Murshidabad called by its old name of Mūkshusābad. At the same time, in spite of the absorption in village affairs, the ordinary village factions over social and religious matters do not obtrude themselves to any great extent. Domestic life

Of recent years the good prices ruling for agricultural produce have introduced more money into the villages, and there has been increased interest in movements for the improvement of caste and for better education, mostly confined, however, to the Bengali-speaking population, the Hindi-speaking portion of the inhabitants being apparently satisfied with their improved material position. This is not surprising, in view of the low status in society of the majority of these latter people, e.g., Binds, Chains and Tiyaars.

The towns are differentiated from the villages by the presence in them of a comparatively large foreign population of professional men and educated men in Government and other employment attracted by business, and in the case of English Bāzār and Nawābhganj also by the courts. This element is on the whole progressive and contributes largely to the working of local and municipal administration and to increasing the amenities of town life. An instance of this activity is the small agricultural and industrial exhibition founded in 1901 and held almost annually since then at English Bāzār. The other side of the picture in the comparison between rural and

village life is the gambling, drinking, and looseness of morals characteristic of town life.

POLITICAL  
MOVEMENTS.

With the exception of the Wāhābi movement, in the course of which some men were prosecuted in 1866 for waging war against the Queen, no political movement appears to have affected the district during British rule till the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905. This was strongest amongst the educated sections of the urban areas, but made its appeal on the protectionist side to the producers of cotton cloths and silks. The greatly increased circulation of vernacular newspapers characteristic of the agitation had little effect amongst the masses in fomenting sedition and anti-Government feelings, but served to quicken interest in secular education and to stir up the secular antipathy between Hindu and Mahomedan. The increased interest in education was particularly noticeable amongst the Mahomedans.

PROMI-  
NENT  
FAMILIES.

There are no prominent old families whose representatives live in the district, and large quantities of land belong to families resident in other districts. Of local residents the Brahmin family of Chānchāl, whose ancestors acquired land in the north of the district, is the most important. The present representative of the family, Raja Sarat Chandra Roy, who received the title of Raja in 1911, resides at Chānchāl and is well known for his liberal support of medical and educational institutions for the benefit of his tenantry. Babu Krishna Lal Choudhuri is the present head of the Tilhi banking and land-holding family of English Bāzār, whose fortunes date from their business relations with the Hon'ble East India Company.

The Gir Gossain of Gosainhat is a zamindar held in considerable respect as an up-country Brahmin and head of an old religious foundation.

Of all the indigo planters who held large quantities of land in the district up to the latter part of last century the sole surviving representative is Mr. George Hennessy, the zamindar of Mathurapur. Amongst the Mahomedans the Miya family of Jot is a well known old Mahomedan family of the district, once large landholders. The heads of the Bāishasāri and Sāishasāri endowments belong to the district of Burdwan and are non-resident landlords.

## CHAPTER IV.

## PUBLIC HEALTH.

THE vital statistics collected through the agency of the village chaukidars are, at any rate up to the recent years, of little value except as showing the relative healthiness and unhealthiness of different years and the relative incidence of common diseases. The returns for towns are more accurate, but the towns are themselves small and contain a number of men who do not bring their families with them. Consequently their statistics afford no accurate indication of the real birth and death rates of the district.

In 1892 the system of reporting by chaukidars of both births and deaths was re-introduced. For the ten years 1892—1901 the average annual rates per mille for the whole district were for births 38·3 and for deaths 33·69. For the ten years 1901—1911 the corresponding figures are births 46·98 per mille and deaths 36·33. Allowing for the increase of population shown by the census of 1911 it would appear that the percentages for the two periods show no great variations. During the period from 1892 to 1911, years in which the recorded number of deaths exceeded those of births are 1894, 1899, 1900, 1907, years in which epidemic malaria prevailed. Between the census of 1901 and that of 1911 the excess of births over deaths was 57,000 or about half the recorded increase of population; allowing for immigration these figures are probably fairly correct.

According to the annual returns, the greatest mortality is due to fever, cholera and small-pox. The usual sequence of these diseases during the year is, cholera during the hot weather in the mango season and towards the end of the rains at the time of the *bhādo* paddy coming into common consumption; fever at the close of the rains and beginning of the cold weather, followed by small-pox which continues occasionally into the rains. Of the three, malarial fever is by far the most important, but as small-pox, cholera and fever are generally the only three diseases which the village chaukidar can distinguish, every death not due to small-pox or cholera is

VITAL  
STATIS-  
TICS

ascribed to fever; it is not possible to say accurately how much of the mortality is due to malarial fever proper. The district shares with Purnea, Dinājpur and Rājshāhi the reputation of being very unhealthy from this cause, and it is safe to say that beside the considerable mortality from malaria in normal years, any increase in the death rate due to fever may be set down to malaria alone. The type of fever common is thus described by the Civil Surgeon:—

"The ordinary type is the tertian form. Quotidian is not rare but the quartan type is seldom seen. Sometimes the fever assumes a remittent form, which occasionally ends fatally. The temperature in some cases remains persistently high, and in some cases there is irregular rise and fall. The temperature is generally highest in the evening. The spleen becomes enormously enlarged after repeated attacks of malarial fever of the intermittent type. The remittent type lasts from a week in mild cases to several weeks in severe cases, and the spleen becomes enlarged, though not so much as in the case of repeated attacks of fever of the intermittent form." The prevalence of malarial fever is not by any means a recent phenomenon in the history of the district. Hamilton ascribes the depopulation of Gaur to malaria. Ralph Fitch, writing in 1556, mentions that 'the muscatoes of Gouren were very big.' At the end of the 18th century Dr. Thomas speaks of the fevers prevalent at Guamalti near Gaur, in which place he was residing, and the thānās of English Pāzār and Sibganj bordering Gaur have still a heavy death rate from malarial fever, which occasionally assumes an epidemic form. The most unhealthy part of the district from this cause is, however, the *bārand*, though the comparative sparseness of the population has tended to obscure the facts.

The deaths per mille from fevers for the years 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1911 were 32·30, 34·64, 34·47, 34·77 and 32·30, respectively. The figures for 1911 show a decrease as they are calculated on the census population of 1911. The mean rate for the five years preceding 1911 on these figures is 24·75. It has been suggested that the cause of the outbreaks in 1905, 1906 and 1907 was the construction of the Katihar-Godagari railway line, which introduced large numbers of coolies into the district, and which may have disturbed the drainage of the country through which it passed. The years 1894—1899 appear, however, to have been years of equally heavy mortality from malaria, and every year there is a considerable flow of labour across the Mahānandā in the cold weather. It would seem that

the district is permanently infected from the *bāriṇḍ* and from Gaur and that years of high floods or short crops create the conditions necessary for the disease to become epidemic in the parts of the district affected by them.

Next to fevers the greatest mortality is caused by cholera. For the decades 1892—1901 and 1902—1911 the average mortality per mille was 2·68 and 2·21, rising to 4·84 in 1893, 6·28 in 1899, 4·39 in 1904, and 6·25 in 1905. The disease is largely spread by the practice of throwing half-burnt bodies into the rivers. From small-pox the average mortality per mille for the decades 1892—1901 and 1902—1911 was ·01 and ·12, being highest in the years 1907 and 1910 with the figures of ·23 and ·54, respectively.

Diarrhœa, dysentery, rheumatism, anæmia, hydrocele, worms and skin and eye affections are common diseases.

In the *bāriṇḍ* the water-supply is derived from tanks which are filled by annual rains and by the heavy dew. This water is generally of a reddish or soapy colour and has a somewhat offensive odour. Wells are infrequent, as the soil is too hard to admit of their being sunk, but their place is taken by shallow water-holes in which surface water accumulates. For the rest of the district where river water, to which preference is given, is not available, water is obtained from ring wells sunk to a depth of 15—20 feet at a cost of from 10 to 15 rupees. The lessened flow of Ganges water through the *Kālindī* has caused a deterioration of the water in the *Mahānandā* for drinking purposes, the bulk of the water now coming straight from the melted snow of the hills and from the swamps through which its tributaries pass.

WATER-SUPPLY

The staple food diet in the east of the district is winter rice and for the great majority of the population flesh also. In the remainder of the district the main diet of the poorer classes consists of the inferior *boro* and *bhādoi* rice with fish, and in the *diḍra* during the winter season barley and wheaten cakes. Both the Bengali and Bihari diets are used in the jail.

DIET OF COMMON PEOPLE.

Outside the towns of English Bāzār and Nawābganj, which maintain trenching grounds, to which the night-soil is removed in carts, there is no system of conservancy. The need is not particularly felt except in the bigger villages, where there are numbers of brick houses with privies, besides the ordinary bamboo huts. The saving circumstances are the annual inundations and the extensive fires which occur when the dry west winds are blowing.

SANITATION.



In the case of large temporary aggregations of people at fairs, the District Board arranges for a supply of sweepers and the protection of the water-supply and medical attendance, but its funds are not sufficient to permit it to grapple with the problems of sanitation in the villages. The town of English Bāzār has a drainage system, but it cannot be said that the municipalities are superior in health to the villages, and in particular the town of Old Mālda is notoriously insanitary and unhealthy. It is curious to note that Hamilton, when speaking of this town which has changed little from his time, compares it favourably with the ordinary European town.

#### VACCINATION

There is very little opposition to vaccination, and such as there is, is confined to members of the reformed Mahomedan sects, mostly in the southern *chars* of the district and in Ratuā. Since 1892 the number of successful vaccinations and revaccinations per year has varied from 26,142 to 51,043, and at the present time some 27 per cent. of the population is protected. The figures of vaccination of recent years have increased considerably owing to the prevalence of small-pox.

#### DISPENSARIES

In 1871 there was only one dispensary in the district, that at English Bāzār, which was started in 1861. At the present time there are ten, all of which, with the exception of that at Chānchāl, receive subsidies from the District Board and, in addition, those of English Bāzār and Old Mālda and Nawabganj from the municipalities in which they are situated. The private dispensary at Chānchāl, which is maintained by Raja Sarat Chandra Roy, is in charge of an assistant surgeon, and medical assistance is afforded to outlying parts of the Raja's estate by itinerant hospital assistants. It is one of the best equipped dispensaries in the district. The remaining rural dispensaries under the charge of sub-assistant surgeons are situated at Harishchandrapur, Mathurāpur, Kāusāt, Gumastāpur, Gājol, Bāmangolā, there being one dispensary to every 100,000 people.

The total number of patients treated at the public dispensaries in 1910 was 51,880 or 54 per mille. The only dispensary in which indoor patients are treated is that at English Bāzār. The accommodation is for 22 males and 6 females, the average daily number of patients being 12; there is a modern operation room, the gift of Mr. Hennessy of Mathurāpur. The number of indoor patients annually averages 300. The grants to dispensaries from District Board and Municipal funds for 1910 were Rs. 10,791, and there was raised by subscription the sum of Rs. 3,185.

The total number of practitioners in the district is 424, of whom eleven have diplomas, including the lady doctor at the English Bāzār dispensary.

Fever, intestinal disorders, skin disease, dysentery and diarrhœa, rheumatism, venereal diseases, diseases of the eye, ear and lungs are the most common diseases treated. Operations for cataract and stone are common, but most of the operations are of a minor nature.

Government quinine in glass tubes each containing a treatment of 32 tabloids is on sale at Post Offices. The sales in 1910 amounted to 226 pounds weight.

QUININE  
DISTRIBUTION

## CHAPTER V.

## AGRICULTURE.

GENERAL  
CONDI-  
TIONS

THE average annual rainfall of the district is about 57 inches: for cultivation, however, variations in rainfall are secondary in importance to the annual inundations, except in the high lands of the *bāriṇḍ*. The rate of rise of the rivers and the time that they remain in flood determine for the rest of the district the character of the cultivation, that is, whether a quick-growing or slow-growing crop of rice, the staple food crop, can be grown. The best rice, is, of course, the transplanted variety harvested in the winter, but such land does not as a rule give a second crop and so is less valuable than the inundated land, which retains its moisture in the cold weather.

The ordinary field of the later alluvium is either saucer-shaped with a swamp or *bil* at its lowest part or slopes down towards water-courses. In the saucer-shaped field the water in the *bil* rises gradually and remains for a period long enough to permit the cultivation of the winter rice not transplanted, known as *āghani*, which rises with the water. The higher lands of the circumference grow quick-growing or *bhādoi* crops under rainfall, but drain too quickly for winter rice. Similarly, in the case of land sloping towards a water-course, there is a tract between the bed of the stream and the higher parts of the land, on which *āghani* can be grown, the lower and upper portion being suitable for the quicker growing crops, grown by flood water and rain water, respectively.

In the case, however, of the Ganges *diāra*, the rapid rise and fall of the river level only permits *bhādoi* crops to be raised in the rains, whilst in the *tāl* and *dūbā* land the same effect follows from the great depths the water quickly reaches and maintains. In the stiff clay of the *bāriṇḍ* which is above flood level, the rain water is retained in the fields by low parapets of earth and the ordinary transplanted winter rice is grown. In the cold weather this soil becomes very hard, and cultivation of cold weather crops is only possible with irrigation.

FERTI-  
LITY.

The southern portion of the district, which receives the Ganges silt, is the most fertile, and next in order comes the northern portion of the district, both these areas being largely

double cropped. The least fertile lands are the higher portions of the *bāriṇḍ* which have only recently been cleared of jungles, and the rather poor soil of the *dūba* and *tāl*.

Common soils of the later alluvium are clay with a small admixture of sand called *matiyāl* or *matal* : *dorash* or *dōḍslā*, a mixture of *mātāl* and sand, and as its name implies, suitable for growing two crops : the mixture of Ganges mud and fine sand known as *māshinā* : *chamā* or *jhenjār*, sandy soil with a somewhat hard crust, only suitable for occasional cropping. *Basta* and *rangamati* are the names of the clay soils of the *bāriṇḍ* which are blackish and red, respectively.

Considerable areas in the centre and south of the district are permanently laid down with mulberry and mango : apart from these the main field crops are the *bhādoi*, the *āghani* and *haimantik* and the *rabi* crops. *Bhādoi* is the early crop sown in May and reaped in the month of August-September, and includes paddy, jute, maize and various millets. *Āghani* and *haimantik* are the winter rice crops, the distinction being that *āghani* is sown broad-cast whilst *haimantik* is transplanted : the *rabi* is the cold weather crop and includes *kalai*, *khesari*, barley wheat, mustard, peas, linseed, gram. Of the normal cropped area 27 per cent. is under *bhādoi* rice : 34 per cent. under *āghani* and *haimantik* rice : 20 per cent. under *rabi* food crops : and 3 per cent. under maize. So far as food stuffs are concerned, the winter, *bhādoi* and *rabi* crops are of almost equal importance.

The area under winter rice is estimated at 290,000 acres and that under *bhādoi* at 234,000 acres. The method of cultivation for *āghani* and *bhādoi* is practically the same. The land is ploughed and cross ploughed from four to eight times according to its quality : a ladder (*moi*) or plank (*choma*) is used to break up the clods and cover the seed, which is sown broad-cast. When the plants are about 4 inches high, a harrow (*bidia*) is used to thin them and the land is weeded : the use of the *bidia* makes the crop grow as regularly as if it had been transplanted. A second weeding is given to crops on high land.

The ordinary *bhādoi* rice is sown in May and reaped, as its name implies, in August-September, but a variety of sixty-day rice known as *jethi* is sown in small quantities in April, in the Ganges *diāra*, in the mud at the edge of the river, and reaped in June before the river begins to rise. There is some tendency for jute cultivation to encroach on the high land *bhādoi* area and for more extensive sowings of *bhādoi* rice to

SOILS.

PRINCIPAL CROPS.

Rice

*Bhādoi* rice.

be made in the low lands. The outturn in such areas, which are very considerable in the *diāra* tracts, depends entirely on the rate of rise of the rivers and, in particular, the Ganges. If the main flood comes before the crop is ripe there are heavy losses : if the rains are normal, and the main flood is late, there is a bumper crop and there is not sufficient time to harvest it. A total loss of 25 per cent. of the produce of such areas, represents an average full crop. *Bhādoi* rice, unlike winter rice, does not keep and is mainly eaten by the poorer classes.

*Aghani*

*Aghani*, the non-transplanted winter rice, is grown mainly in the north of the district. as its name implies, it is reaped in the month of Aghran (November-December). It is sown in June and July. This rice, though it has keeping properties, is not so fine as the transplanted rice.

*Haimantik*

It has already been mentioned that transplanted winter rice grows in the higher land of the *bāriṇḍ*. It is known as *haimantik* rice. As soon as the rains commence, low lying plots of land, or plots near a tank which can be irrigated, are prepared and sown broadcast for seedlings. At the same time the fields are ploughed from four to six times, the rain water being retained in each plot by low walls of mud or *ails*. On steeper slopes the ground is terraced, and frequently there is a tank at the top of the slope from which the upper fields are irrigated as necessary. Before transplantation of the seedlings the soil in the fields is reduced to soft mud. Transplantation goes on from July to September according to the rainfall. Varieties of *haimantik* rice are *chenga*, *tilkaphul*, *kalam*, *tal sail*, *jhagari*, *basphul*, *shubandan*, *madhubinni*, *phorbini*, *binna-phul*, *indra sail*, *maṣara*, *jhinga sail*, *parbhat jira*, *etai dad-khani*, *kataribhog*, *kanakchur*, *parijat*, *sonamukhi*, *gopalbhog*. The crop is reaped in December-January, and is largely exported.

Other varieties of rice

The spring rice, known as *boro*, is largely cultivated in the *bils* in which water remains throughout the cold weather. The land up to the edge of deep water is ploughed as for winter rice during the months of November-December and the surface of the fields, which are divided by *ails*, made into a soft batter of mud. Water is lifted from the *bil* by means of the *jāl*, a trough closed at one end. The trough is pivoted, so that the closed end can be let down into the water to be raised : the contents, when the trough is lifted, run out at the other end at the higher level. Usually, to facilitate lifting, in addition to the pedal at the open end, there is an upright near the trough, to which is slung a weighed cross beam connected with the closed

end of the trough by a piece of rope. The operator pulls the weight till the trough rises high enough to let him apply his own weight to the pedal. By a series of *jāts* water can be lifted in large quantities to a considerable height. The seedlings are grown either in a specially prepared piece of ground, or more frequently in the soft mud left on the banks of the rivers as they fall in October-November. Transplantation is done as for *haimantik* paddy, and the crop is cut in April-May being kept watered by means of the *jāt*.

Other *bhādoi* food crops are *marla* (*Eleusine Coracana*), *saina* (*Panicum frumentarum*), *kodi* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*), *china* (*Paricum miliaceum*) which are sown in small quantities at the same time as and very often mixed with *bhādoi* paddy, with which they are reaped. Maize (*Zea Mays*) is also grown, chiefly by the Sonthals in the higher lands of the *bārind* which are not suitable for rice.

Other  
*bhādoi*  
food crops

The main *rabi* crops are *kalai* (*Phaseolus radiatus*), peas, wheat, barley, gram (*Vicer arietinum*), *mug* (*Phaseolus mungo*), *masuri* (*Ervum Lens*), *arhar* (*Cajanus indicus*) and *khesari* (*Lathyrus sativus*), besides oilseeds, the first five being the most important of the food-stuffs. As soon as the *bhādoi* crops are harvested on the higher lands and when the floods have subsided on the lower, ploughing is commenced for the *rabi* crops. The first sown is *kalai*, which is frequently grazed off and followed by another *rabi* crop. The higher lands are ploughed four to six times for wheat and barley, and twice for peas. *Khesari* is chiefly cultivated with *āghari* rice, being sown broadcast in the rice fields in October. In the *diāra* tracts two *rabi* crops are frequently grown together: the richness of the soil from the Ganges silt otherwise causing plants to grow big at the expense of the produce. The crops are harvested from January to April. For the district the average area under wheat and barley is estimated at 90,000 acres, under gram 8,000, and under the remaining food crops 10,000 acres.

*Rabi* or  
cold  
weather  
crops

Of oilseeds the most important are mustard (*Brassica campastris*), *til* (*Sesamum indicum*), linseed (*Linum usitatissimum*), and *sirguja* (*Guizota Abyssinica*). The normal area under mustard is 60,000 acres and of the others 20,000 acres. For these crops the land is ploughed four times, and laddered till a smooth surface is produced. Of recent years there has been a great extension of oil-seed cultivation in the *tili* and *dābā* lands.

Oilseeds

Jute is grown on a normal area of 30,000 acres approximately. The best quality is known as *poli* jute, grown in the

Other  
crops.

low land of Gājol thānā. The ordinary *deshi* jute is of inferior quality due in the main to the seed not being properly selected and indifferent methods of retting. *Sunn* hemp is also grown in small quantities for local use.

#### Mulberry

Mulberry leaf raising is one of the most important industries of the district, the area under the mulberry plant being estimated at 23,000 acres. The conditions which this plant requires to give remunerative results are a light soil above flood level with good drainage, and a water level which does not fall below a moderate depth. These conditions obtain naturally, or can be created by embanking the land, over large areas of the southern and central portions of the district.

The chief centres of the cultivation are locally known as *juars*, of which the main divisions are the upper *juars* round Jot, Dhantola, Kagaicherra, Chandipur; the *diāra juars* round Goyesbari, Jalālpur and Sujapur; and the Bholāhāt *juars* round Bholāhāt and Kasimpore.

The mulberry tree commonly grown is the *Morus indica* and it is cultivated as a shrub, the plants being arranged in lines at a distance apart of eighteen inches to two feet. The plant is propagated from cuttings, and once established is very long-lived, resembling in this and in its method of cultivation the tea plant. It is pruned in August or September so as to prevent its reaching a height of more than 18 inches to 2 feet. The manure most generally used is decayed vegetation from the *bils*, of which the chief ingredient is the *kachu*. In the cold weather this is cut in great quantities and stacked at the side of the *bils* to drain and decompose. Its value is about Re. 1 per cart-load. The fields are regularly hoed and weeded and kept scrupulously clean, as an admixture of leaves of other plants kills the silk-worms. The leaf is also useless for feeding purposes if the ground is flooded, and in years of very high flood there is much loss from this source. Leaf plucking goes on practically throughout the year, though there are three main seasons, November, April and June.

The value of the leaf is from Re. 1 to Re. 1-8 per maund, rising, as the cocoons ripen off, to as high as Re. 5 in years of scarcity of leaf through drought or any other cause. The average produce of an acre of mulberry is about 300 maunds of leaf and stalks, and taking the cost of cultivation at Re. 75 the profit is about Re. 20 per month.

#### Mangoes

The profits from the cultivation have led within the last three decades to an extension of the area under mulberry, but they are rivalled by those from mango orchards. It is common,

when the soil is suitable, to combine the two, the land being worked as a mulberry field till the mango trees have established themselves and grown too large to permit of cultivation underneath them. Mālda has long been famous for its mangoes; it is recorded that Nāwab Murshid Ali Kuli Khan used to send an armed guard for the trees the fruits of which were reserved for his use. Dr. Buchanan Hamilton writes :— “The mangoes called Mālda have a high reputation, and may be considered as one of the finest fruits in the world, but few of these grow at Mālda (the present police-station of Old Mālda): all the plantations of the most valuable kinds are on the opposite side of the Mahānandā in the Purnea district (the present police-station English Bāzār). Still, however, the mangoes of the left bank of the Mahānandā are preferable to any others in Dinājpur. As the produce of the mango tree, even in its present state, is one of the most valuable in this district (Dinājpur), for it cannot be of less annual value on an average than Ra. 4,50,000, and as the management is better understood at Mālda than anywhere else, I shall give some account of the manner in which this fine tree is cultivated by the people of that place. A bigha of ground is considered as a direct plantation. In the sixth year or when the trees are from six to nine years old, they begin to yield saleable fruit; and their produce is reckoned to be doubled every year for five years. The produce now becomes nearly stationery, for although the trees grow larger and produce a greater number, the size and value of the fruit diminishes. The only expense after the first five years is to watch and collect the fruit, the rent, and a little ploughing or hoeing; a plantation will last 50 or 60 years.

“It might be supposed that, with such a large profit, the plantations would be extending fast; but this does not appear to be the case. The great uncertainty of the crop is no doubt also a strong objection to these plantations. In many years the mango almost entirely fails, and in others it is so exceedingly abundant that there is scarcely any sale for the produce. Heavy fogs or rains, when the flowers have expanded, almost certainly prevent the fruit from forming. Besides, a capital of Ra. 40 or 50 is rather uncommon.

“The natives are entirely ignorant of the art of engrafting, which is the only means by which good kind can with certainty be reared. In Dinājpur green mangoes come into season about the 12th of April, and continue until almost the end of May. During the season they enter largely into the dishes of



the natives and are preserved at Mālda in sugar or honey. Some are cut into four parts and dried in the sun ; but by far the greatest part is preserved by cutting the green pulp from the stone, and beating it with mustard seed, salt and turmeric, to which are occasionally added some of the carminative seeds, such as cummin. Those preparations keep throughout the year and are a common seasoning for the food of the natives. The ripe mangoes continue from the end of May until the middle of July. Their expressed juice is frequently inspissated by exposure to the sun ; in this state it will keep throughout the year, and is eaten with milk (*malai*)."

This was written in 1808 A.D., and since that time the cultivation has made immense strides. The chief improvement is in grafting, so much so that the sale of grafts alone is a considerable trade of the value of Rs. 30,000 per year. The grafts (*kalam*) are raised by the marching method and are sold at from one rupee to two rupees each. There are now some fifty distinct varieties of mangoes obtained by grafting in the Mālda district, of which the best known are the Brindāban, Gōpālbhōg, Kesapat and Fusli, by means of the last of which the mango season has been extended into August. The hole in which the original Fusli tree grew is still pointed out at Nimāsarai. As in Hamilton's time the best mangoes are still grown in the English Bāzār thānā, in the angle of the rivers Kālindrī and Mahānandā, and in this portion of the district the cultivation has encroached considerably on that of the ordinary field crops. There appear to be conditions of soil and climate here which favour the growth of the tree. The laying out of graft mango gardens is, however, extending over the whole of the district west of the Mahānandā, and in particular round Mahādipur on the Paglā, and on the Gaur embankments. The chief consideration, if the soil be suitable, is the facilities for transport, and in particular water transport, as most of the profits come from the export trade. The garden must be on ground above flood level : the young trees are guarded against high floods by planting them in a mound of earth of the requisite height, and protected by bamboos against erosion. The trees are set about 30 feet apart though many gardens are to be found closer planted with consequent loss of vitality to the trees. Ordinary manures are used, but, when available, fish manure is applied to particularly valuable trees. The crop is uncertain, but the extension of cultivation has lessened the chances of total failure, and there is a full crop on an average once in three or four years. The

value of the crop of an acre of graft trees in full bearing is from five to six hundred rupees, though these prices are very often exceeded for well-known gardens. The fruits are plucked with a hand net and will keep for from 17 to 18 days. Besides the gardens of graft trees which are planted mainly for the export trade, there are ordinary village gardens in which the trees are from seedlings (*guli*). The total acreage under orchards is roughly estimated at 15,000 acres.

Tobacco is grown as a garden crop for local consumption, the normal area under this crop being about 10,000 acres. Tobacco.

The cultivation of indigo has totally ceased in this district, though 50 years ago there were 27 factories working. Indigo

Sugarcane is not an important crop, being chiefly grown for eating and in small quantities. Sugarcane

Vegetables are cultivated in garden plots for household use and for sale in the *bāzār*. The most important are the sweet potato, the *baugun* (*Solanum melongena*), pumpkins (*Lagenaria vulgaris*) and gourds (*Benincasa cerifera*), country radishes and melons. Large quantities of onions and chilis are grown in *Gājol thānā*. Most European vegetables grow well, in particular tomatoes and cauliflowers. Potato cultivation has not made much headway, though it is common in *Tulsihātā thānā*. Of trees, besides the mango are cultivated the plantain, jack fruit (*Artocarpus integrifolia*), the *litchi* (*Nephelium litchi*), whilst custard-apple (*Anona squamosa*) and *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*) trees are common. In *Gaur* there are regular plantations of plantains, but the fruit is of inferior quality. The *khejura* (*Phoenix sylvestris*) and palmyra palm are common, they are tapped for liquor, and the *khejura* is also used to a small extent for sugar extraction. *Pān* (*Piper betel*) for use with the areca nut is also grown. Vegetables and fruits

The district has not been cadastrally surveyed. The statistics of the acreage under cultivation are based originally on the report of the Revenue Surveyor in 1852. Since then they have been corrected from time to time on the reports of the local officers, and the figures are merely approximate.

AGRI-  
CULTURAL  
STATIS-  
TICS.

The total normal acreage (1901-02) of the cropped land is returned at 842,700 acres, of which 169,900 acres are cropped more than once, leaving a net acreage under cultivation of 672,800. Taking the figures for the five years 1907—1911 the proportions of *bañdoi* crops not including jute, winter rice and *rabi* are 38.2, 36.9 and 24.9, respectively, the net area under *arabbi* and pulses being 717,000 acres and under oilseeds 64,000 acres. Allowing 70,000 acres for orchards, mulberry and

jute, it will be seen that in comparison with the normal area there has been an increase of cultivation during the last decade corresponding to the increase of population.

Out of the total acreage of the district 332,000 acres were returned in 1901-02 as cultivable waste, so that there is still a considerable quantity of land remaining to be taken up, mostly in the north and east of the district and of inferior quality.

Improvements in methods of cultivation.

It cannot be said that the people are unduly conservative, and there can be no doubt that they are good cultivators. Practically rotation of crops is practised in double cropped lands, which beside are annually refertilised by silt. It is true that complaints are heard of loss of fertility, but what evidence is available does not point to any general deterioration of the land. The diversity of crops is partly due to the diversity of people who have reclaimed great parts of the district during the past half century : the Bihari, for example, is not used to jute and dislikes working in deep water ; the Sonthal is attracted towards the high lands under jungle and prefers maize cultivation ; the man of the *diāra* is unable to live in the *bāriṇḍ* and is attracted towards the *dūbās* and the *tāl*. The tendency, however, is for the new generation to sink its traditional prejudices and devote itself to the most profitable forms of cultivation. For example, maize cultivation extended in the *diāra* after it was found that Sonthals in the district were willing to trade winter rice against it. Capital is constantly flowing into mulberry and mango. Rice cultivation is extending in the *bāriṇḍ* where the opening of the railway has given a value to land practically valueless a few years ago.

MANURE.

Cow-dung manure is used for jute crops ; for mulberry, peat soil is also used : at one time also bat guano was procurable in some quantities from the ruins of Gaur, but with the restoration of the buildings the supply is negligible. *Kalai* is used as green manure. In the hot weather the stubbles and grass are commonly burnt in the north of the district. A good deal of valuable cattle manure is burnt for fuel, the supply of wood not being sufficient to satisfy the domestic demand, as well as the requirements for reeling cocoons.

AGRICULTURAL LOANS.

Of recent years fairly large sums of money have been distributed under the Agriculturists' Loans Act to tide over occasional partial failure of crops.

CATTLE.

The local breeds are poor, but large quantities of buffaloes and bullocks are brought from Bihār, and the oxen used for carting on the Rājmahāl road are generally up-country beasts. The difficulties in the way of keeping cattle in condition are